(ii) Government of Bihar has agreed for arranging lifting of soft coke through nominated persons/ agencies.

(iii) Steam coal in lieu of soft coke has also been offered to Bihar as domestic fuel.

(iv) Coal India Limited has given linkages for briquetting and SSF units in the State of Bihar for manufacture of briquettes and smokeless fuel.

(v) A low temperature coal carbonisation plant has been set up at Dankuni near Calcutta which produces CILCOKE. This has a much higher heat value as compared to Soft Coke and is an ideal fuel for domestic use. Efforts are being made through the State Government to popularise the use of CILCOKE for domestic consumption.

Proposal to Join Regional Trade Boards

*100. SHRI VISHWASRAO RAMRAO PATIL:
SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:

Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have any pro posal to favour joining regional trading blocks, as a recognition of the prevailing trends in the world trading system;

(b) if so, what are the details thereof;

(c) whether it is a fact that Government are considering to join ASEAN for trading;

(d) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(e) if not, what are the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) and (b) There is no proposal for India to join a regional trading bloc.

(c) and (d) here is no proposal for India seeking membership of the ASEAN. Both India and ASEAN have, however, decided upon establishing a sectoral dialogue relationship covering such areas as trading, investment and tourism. The aim of this exercise is to promote trade and economic exchanges between the two sides within the Multilateral Trading System established under the GATT.

(e) India prefers the multilateral to the regional approach. Our efforts have been to strengthen multilateralism during the Uruguay Round as it is believed that non-discriminatory trade offers the greatest promise for expansion of world trade.

Withdrawal of Ration Cards from Tax Payers

679. SHRI SHANTI TYAGI:
SHRI SURESH KALMADI:
DR. BAPU KALDATE:
DR. SANJAYA SINH:

Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government propose to exclude the tax payers from purchase of subsidised food grains through the public distribution system;

(b) if so, the reasons therefor;

(c) whether Government have received any protest against this move from self-employed and salaried persons, if so, the details thereof; and

(d) what is the likely impact of such move on food subsidy and also on the self-employed, middle and salaried class people who are paying small amounts of tax and reeling under the relentless rising cost and inflation?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI KAMALUDDIN AHMED): (a) to (d) At the 14th meeting of the Advisory Council on Public Distribution System held in July, 1992,

the State Governments/UT Administrations requested the Central Government to evolve a National Policy on Public Distribution System so that the benefits of PDS are restricted only to the needy and deserving. While this issue, including the possibility of exclusion of certain categories of consumers, is being examined, the current policy of Central Government is that PDS entitlement is universal. A few State Governments have decided on exclusion of certain categories of the population like income-tax assessees etc.

The Central Government has not received any reports regarding protest from self-employed and salaried persons in the States where such criteria have been adopted.

The major objective of the exercise is to examine how the benefits of food subsidy can be made available to the needy and deserving sections of the population.

Demand and Supply of Foodgrains to States

680. SHRI MURLIDHAR CHANDRAKANT BHANDARE: Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state the demand and supplies of sugar, edible oils, and foodgrains for the public distribution system during 1992-93 in Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI KAMALUDDIN AHMED): A statement showing the demand, allocation and lifting of rice and wheat and the allocation and lifting of levy sugar and imported edible oils during April, 1992 to December, 1992 is given in Annexure. [*See* Apendix CLXVI, Annexure No. 13]. Levy sugar is allocated generally on a uniform norm of 425 gms per capita monthly availability on the basis of projected population in the State/UT as on 1.10.1986. A five percent ad-hoc increase in the levy sugar allocation was made to States/UTs from August, 1991. Imported edible oil is allocated to State Governments/UT Administrations depending on availability of imported edible oil in the Central stock and open market availability of indigenous oils.

Need to Increase Scope of Consumer Protection Act

681. SHRI SOM PAL: Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether there is a proposal under Government's consideration to bring civic services, like water supply, health cover and house construction under Consumer Protection Act;

(b) if so, what measures are being initiated in this regard; and

(c) what are the names of other services proposed to be brought under this Act?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION WITH ADDITIONAL CHARGE OF THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE (SHRI KAMALUDDIN AHMED): (a) to (c) The high power Working Group which was constituted to suggest suitable amendments to make the Consumer Protection Act, 1986, more effective, has recommended to include these services within the purview of the Act. The recommendations of the Working Group are under the consideration of the Government.

Losses in National Cooperative Consumers Federation

682. SHRI SOM PAL: Will the Minister of CIVIL SUPPLIES, CONSUMER AFFAIRS AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Government are holding over 75 per cent shares of the National Cooperative Consumers Federation and have invested about Rs. 9 crores in this respect;

(b) if so, whether the losses of the